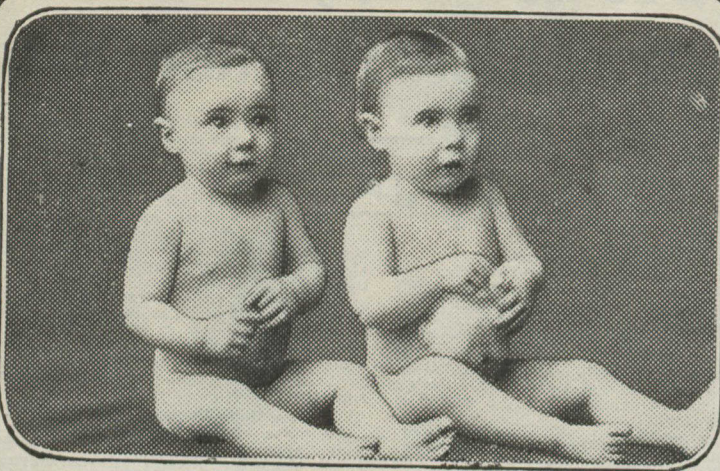




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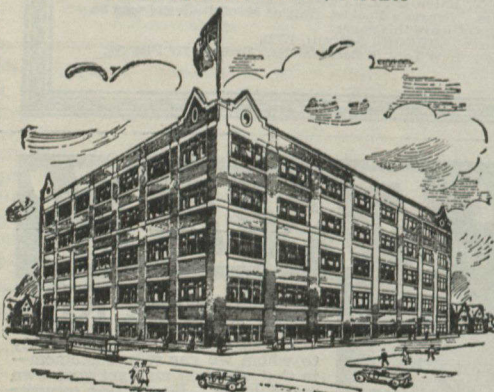
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The Match Breakers

(Continued from page 9)

and she flashed about on the seat. The comb, that held the soft tendrils of her hair at the back, fell with a clang, disappearing behind the seat. He started to rise, but she had already noticed her loss. She stood up and investigated. He realized that the comb had dropped into the slot which receives the shutter when lowered. But before he could find the courage to address her again, she had beckoned the conductor into the car.

"I've lost my comb down that place—there—" she explained plaintively. "Do you think you can get it for me?"

The conductor stared stupidly. "Get that hook that you use when the car's off the trolley," she commanded. Returning, he fumbled with it in the slot, but unsuccessfully.

Two men stopped the car and held the conductor for a moment's conversation before they decided on another route. In his absence the girl poked without avail at the narrow opening.

"I must get it," she said when the conductor returned. "It's set with jade. I should feel heartbroken if I lost it."

"Well, I guess they can get it for you at the car station," the conductor drawled. Then again he left her abruptly to help aboard the kitty-faced old lady who, after a voluble interval, elected to take a later car.

The man in the corner got up and strolled to the girl's side. "Let me try," he entreated.

"If you will be so good," she permitted frostily after an icy pause. She held out to him the instrument of her own defeat.

"Please don't give me the hook again," he asked humbly. He took one of the props from his golf bag and, breaking it at its jointed middle, transformed it into a fishing rod. He attached a hook to it and began to fish.

The girl stared in amazement. Then she inhibited a smile. She watched. "The trouble is that you haven't any bait," she suggested after several moments of unsuccessful angling. "If we only had a copy of 'Izaak Walton'." Her voice had become very soft.

He snapped the rod together and returned it to his bag. With frowning brows he examined the sticks there.

"I'd advise a mashie," she volunteered. But he ignored her suggestion. Seizing a putter he went at it again. By degrees his face assumed a look of intense concentration and then suddenly his right arm shot up and the comb flew out of the opening. He caught it adroitly and handed it to her.

"I lofted it," he said in a tone of great satisfaction.

"Thank you!" She adjusted the comb firmly in its proper place. Then she pulled the edges of her veil together and pinned them firmly over it.

He started irresolutely to return to his corner again.

"I don't suppose," she began, "that I would have cared such an awful lot for the mistake. But no girl likes to be taken for another girl."

"It was all the fault of that feather," he protested with eager fluency. "I give you my word of honor now that I look at you"—he fixed her with so enthusiastic a scrutiny that she turned her face away "that that girl doesn't look any more like you than my grandmother does. I don't know who she is—or what she came from—or where she's gone, and I don't want to slam her. But honestly, I pity her from the bottom of my heart for having all the beginnings of beauty and then falling down at the last moment. You've got her played to the gaff, whipped a mile—backed on to the fire escape. But I'm glad she came ahead and prepared the way, for I know I never could have stood the full blaze at once. I'm getting all this out of my system to prove to you that I shall never make this same mistake again. No, not if you wear forty feathers. Do you mind if I sit on the other side of it?—it obscures the view."

When she caught her breath she merely said: "It's immaterial where you sit. I get out in a half minute at the Arlington Heights Station."

"So do I," he averred humbly.

"You said you were going to Arlington."

"So did you."

"But I'm going beyond it."

"So am I."

She bit her lips. "As a matter of fact," she announced sweetly, "I'm going to Concord."

"I don't expect you to believe me, but so am I."

She looked at him in silent exasperation. While they waited for the Lexington car, she made one remark. "I suppose you're from the West." When he admitted it, her answering gasp seemed to say that that accounted for a good deal.

"May I sit beside you again?" he asked when they boarded the Lexington car. Without waiting for a reply, he put himself on the side opposed to the feather.

"Well," she said in a tone that indicated that she had given up some sort of struggle with herself, "inasmuch as we seem doomed to travel to the Pacific coast together, and as the rest of the world seems to avoid us as if we were a leper colony—"

Her eye fell on the gilt letters that proclaimed the ownership of the card case he was just opening. "Are you Robert Ardsley?" she demanded.

"Yes."

She jumped and then shrank away from him. "Good heavens, I'm glad I found that out." She added with a stiffness, "I'm Barbara Bennett. That's why you looked so familiar. I've seen dozens of pictures of you taken with Dick."

"Barbara Bennett!" He stared open-mouthed. "Oh course! That picture of you and Rhoda hung in our room in college for two years."

SHE straightened herself up, and her face, turned directly to him, was freezing in its look. "And of course as Rhoda Wrentham's best friend, I must refuse—absolutely—to have anything to say to the man who is responsible for her unhappiness."

"I—responsible for her! I don't know what you're talking about, Miss Bennett. I had nothing to do with their broken engagement. Dick talked the matter over with me—the way a man talks things over with his chum—and I gave him my advice when he asked it. But as for being responsible for their broken engagement—you're quite mistaken! Upon my word you are, Miss Bennett."

"Unfortunately," the lady's tone had all the clearness and coldness of an icy mountain stream, "Dick happened to quote to Rhoda some of the things you said. She came straight to me with them. I heard the whole story in silence. But of course when she got down on her bended knees and asked my advice, I couldn't withhold it from her."

"So I understand. Dick is strongly under the impression that if Miss Wrentham had not been tampered with—by outside forces—"

"Meaning me?"

"Meaning you, if you wish—that their engagement would never have been broken."

"Of all things! Why, I maintained so judicial an attitude through it all that I nearly exploded. And all the time I was simply dying to tell Rhoda just what I thought of Dick Wrentham. A man who while he is engaged to one girl goes off automobiling in a party that contains another girl to whom he has been markedly attentive in the past, and to simply load that girl with attentions until everybody in the party was talking about it and coming home and hinting and alluding to Rhoda—and pitying her. Well, I've my opinion of him."

"Miss Bennett, that's simply ridiculous. You know that Dick would never have gone off with that party if Rhoda—if Miss Wrentham had not gone to the



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